

# DIGITAL IMAGING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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## Cyberculture to E-Culture (sounds so late eighties early 90s)? Erm... Towards E-topia? Part 2

The WWW over the years seems to shift from being a new frontier, a wild west as one writer put it, to something that resembles a property developer's paradise. Is Tim Berners-Lee's utopian vision and rather altruistic outlook being challenged by the giant software companies, international corporations and governments eager to control the flow of information? Certainly over the years, governments have attempted curtail "free-speech" on the web. In a previous post I said that Tony Benn championed the use of Internet and web technologies. I saw an interview where he discussed other means of communication, which were 'nationalised' by a government: during the reformation, Henry VIII placed a priest in every pulpit to say exactly what the king wanted his people to hear and during the reign of Charles II the postal service was established. The web, he argued was for the people and so counters the official language of institutions and governmental agencies. The web's pluralistic and multi-vocal nature makes this a radical communication system, that 'undermines the borders of national identity', central authority and erodes 'the old distinctions between public and private self' (Ward, 1997, 2003 pp. 124-5). Its ability to transcend boundaries has led to it to be described as the first postmodern medium.

In the mid to late nineties we saw the struggle between Netscape and Microsoft for control of the Web. Controlling the means of communication controls the information that flows through it. Companies like Reuters have always appreciated the importance of technology in the distribution of information. Microsoft attempted to create an alternative web with MSN (Microsoft Network). This essentially failed. The creation of Explorer, Microsoft's browser, challenged the dominance of Netscape. This led to disagreements over technical protocols and certainly Microsoft's early actions have been interpreted as an attempt to curtail the freedom of the user and the eclectic and anarchic nature of the web, with Microsoft pushing it's own ideas about protocols that were/are different from everyone else's. These technical difficulties have been largely resolved through the dedication of people like Tim Berners-Lee and the World Wide Web Consortium ([www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org)). Microsoft's business practices have been questioned and it's monopoly of the operating system and web browser market that has in the words of some commentators led to a monoculture, has been attacked in court. This did not lead to a break up of the company, but recently Mozilla Firefox has challenged Microsoft's dominance of the browser market.

New Scientist: "Microsoft monoculture allows virus spread" 25 September 2003: [www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn4203](http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=dn4203)

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